

The Greatest Need of the Country.

Newspapers teem with arguments in favor of road improvement. The same refrain comes to us from the stump. Even farmers, with loads of produce on their wagons in muddy lanes, frequently mention the topic, or its equivalent, by uncomplimentary terms applied to the roads they are dealing with. We assume that curses applied to bad roads are equivalent to blessings applied to good roads—when enough good road can be found to apply a few words of commendation to. Practically everybody favors good roads—city people, who never use them, and country people who often find them unusable. If all people admit the benefits that would result from good roads, why do we find only bad roads? The answer is, that some people think good, hard, waterproof country roads an impossibility; some want good roads, but contend that it takes both money and labor to build them—and who wants to pay money to make good roads to be used by other people? City people are willing to be taxed for street improvement, for that increases the value of their property, but to build roads in the country would increase the value of farm property, and will not increase the productive capacity of the land. Thus it is that on the road question, as on many other subjects, the people do not think or work together, but “pull-off” like a yoke of contrary oxen. It is a strange fact that in this country we have the best railroads, both steam and electricity, in the world, and the worst country roads of any civilized nation on earth.

If there is any work possible that would benefit an agricultural section as much as building good roads therein, we have never heard of it, and it has never been even suggested. The most serious handicap country people have is the result of muddy roads. When roads are muddy, fields are muddy also, and the farmer can neither work in his fields nor market his crops, nor visit his neighbors. It is said by eminent authority that in France, Belgium and other countries where good roads are the rule, farmers always market their produce in wet weather, because at such times they cannot work in their fields; but their roads being like unto paved streets, they can do their marketing at any time. The season is now almost upon us when farmers can only reach their market towns by struggling through muddy lanes and over boggy sloughs. Would it not be better for the towns if farmers had easy access to them at all times? Would it not pay the towns and cities to aid the country, the State or the National Government and the country people in building good roads? Surely a system of good roads radiating from them to all parts of the tributary country would be as beneficial to the business interests as to agriculture. The importance of this work demands that the farmers, the city people, the counties and the National Govern-

ment aid in its prosecution. Some will say that the National Government is spending too much of the people's money already. This may be true; but is this money spent judiciously? The fact is, of all the money spent by the Government, country people receive but little benefit. The last session of Congress used up \$753,484,018. Of this, \$5,978,160 was used for the benefit of agriculture, or less than 1 per cent of the whole. The army and navy received over \$160,000,000, or twenty-six times as much as was expended for the benefit of agriculture. Consider which is of most benefit to the country, agriculture, or the huge military force. The cost to this country of maintaining our authority in the Philippine Islands for one year would build more than 16,000 miles of macadam roads without the assistance of State, county or precinct. It is well known that farmers pay more tax than city people in proportion to the value of their property. The cities get their tax money back, because salaries, cost of public works, and practically all government expenditures are disbursed in cities. When farmers pay their taxes there is very little of it that ever returns to them. Therefore, is it at all unreasonable that the government should aid the States and counties in building country roads? Just how this matter may be arranged we are not prepared to say. It is plain, however, that an economical administration could save enough money from present, direct and indirect taxes to go far towards enabling localities to build good roads. Surely it is not necessary, as is now the case, that the government expenditures should be ten times as great as when the population was one-half what it is now.—Farm and Ranch.

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